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ABSTRACT

Differences between English and Arabic are examined to assist the English as a second language (ESL) teacher. It is suggested that in order to know how to help students, ESL teachers must understand what the problem or difference is and why it is occurring. The sound systems of English and Arabic, including the suprasegmentals of intonation, stress, and rhythm, are contrasted, along with selected grammatical features. Attention is directed to contrastive features that not only cause semantic confusion, but also those that may trigger an emotional response not intended or realized by the Arabic speaker of English. All the vowels in English are, with one exception, in Arabic. Among the issues in teaching vowels to Arabic students is to lengthen the four long vowels in English; this is important in working on stress and unstress. In relation to consonants, the Arabic speakers tend to aspirate stop sounds in English in all positions, a practice which may make them appear overly strong and aggressive. Additionally, it is recommended that oral and written work is needed to teach the English final consonant clusters that are not permitted in Arabic. Another important thing to know is that monosyllabic words in Arabic are always stressed. This and other differences in the oral language patterns cause interference in controlling rhythm, intonation, and stress. Contrastive data and examples of errors are presented, based on work with intermediate and advanced students. (SW)

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ORAL DIFFERENCES IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC: A VIEW FROM THE ESL TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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The question was asked in the meeting this morning, "Can you be an effective language teacher without some understanding of the native language of the student you are teaching?" Betty Robinette answered, "No," and I firmly agree. It is impossible for us as ESL teachers to know exactly how to help students achieve even partial control of language forms if we are not able to understand what the problem or difference is and why it is occurring. We may hear a difference, but what exactly is it? What is this peculiar structure written in English words? Are we able to help interpret these differences? As good ESL teachers we should be able to provide a lot of such understanding, I feel. But how, if we don't speak the students' native language ourselves? We can accomplish this partially, without question, by following another suggestion made earlier today by Dr. Longacre -- that we read the literature.

Now I know for myself and my colleagues that we do try to read the literature, but it is often difficult to find broad enough descriptions of other languages, much less contrasted with English, to give us as ESL teachers all the aid we'd like or feel we need. Still we search to find what we can to learn some of the contrastive features of a particular language and English. With this information, we then listen more acutely,

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This article is based on an oral presentation at a workshop held at U.C. Davis, on October 7, 1978.

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read student papers more perceptively, and record the errors that our own students are making. With this accumulated information, we shape and focus emphasis in our courses, hoping to make our next clssses, at least, better because of this effort.

It's my hope that I can help language teachers work better with Arab students. Here at U.C. Davis, we have compiled some information, included in the appended analysis, which contrasts some features of English and Arabic. Included also are selected contrastive data to which has been added error data collected locally from our high intermediate and advanced level students. We find that this information is helping us work more specifically with English/Arab differences.

The first section provides a specific analysis of the sound system of English and Arabic, including the suprasegmentals of intonation, stress, and rhythm. In the second section, some selected grammatical features are discussed. While reviewing as much of this information as time allows, I'd like to concentrate on the contrastive features which not only may cause semantic confusion, but also those which may trigger an emotional response not intended or realized by the Arabic speaker of English. I've a feeling that Arab students sometimes come on rather strongly, maybe aggressively or overly emphatically, possibly even dictatorially, without any idea that they are communicating these kinds of messages. I will pay special attention to these kinds of differences when they can be identified because we've talked quite a lot in these meetings about trust, caring, and interrelating. I think that there are some things, and some rather simple facts at that, to which we can alert our Arab students.

Starting with the vowels, where most pronunciation classes begin, I might say that nothing in vowel pronunciation or mispronunciation is likely to generate wrong emotional messages. Wrong semantic messages, yes. But this, of course, is very important; so let's look at the English and Arabic vowel systems. Note that all the vowels in English are, in fact, in Arabic with the exception of /ɔ/ ball. Since this is lacking in some American dialects, too, you may decide not to bother teaching it. Many California teachers, whose dialect does not include the phoneme, do make this decision. That will be up to you to decide, too.

The important thing in working with vowels, however, is realizing that the English vowels which appear to be lacking in Arabic (/I/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ʌ/, and /ə/ in addition to /ɔ/) actually are sounds in Arabic, but they are allophones rather than full phonemes. The Arab student is able to make them in isolation so we don't need to worry about having to teach them per se. The student can usually make them in minimal pairs, too. What is important to realize is that they are each one of a three-

way variation on one English vowel, so it will be necessary to work with a three-way distinction rather than the typical two-way vowel distinction. /I/ varies with /ɛ/ and /i/; /ɛ/ varies with /I/ and /e/; /æ/ varies with /ə/ and /a/; /ə/ varies with /a/ and /o/; /ʊ/ varies with /u/ and /o/. Thus drill should be /meet, mit, met/; /met, mit, mate/; /hat, hut, hot/; /pool, pull, pole/; rather than /meet, mit/, etc.

The next important thing about the vowels is working with Arab students to lengthen the four long vowels in English because this is so very important in working on stress and unstress. The alternation of stress and unstress, of course, is basic to the rhythm patterns of English. Vowel lengthening, thus, is of prime importance and must be worked on in words but also within phrases and full sentences. The other side of this emphasis is shortening vowels in unstressed situations. Our experience is that Arab students need considerable work on both these features of English vowels, perhaps because vowel length is fixed, non-varying in Arabic sounds. Learning both is essential to understand reductions, even if they can't produce them.

Perceiving length is necessary in working with dipthongs, too. Notice in the analysis that the Arab vowel system has a set of short vowels and long vowels (/ii/, /ee/, /uu/, /oo/). The Arab student is likely to substitute his double vowel for the English long vowel. Usually he will be understood because it sounds very close, but if you have a student who wants to speak 100% like a native speaker of English, then you can work on the off-glide of the /y/ and /w/ in these English vowels. Notice, however, that since /ɔ/ is lacking, the dipthong /ɔy/, as in annoy, will need to be taught. Also, since æ/a/ə are allophones in Arabic, the dipthongs /ay/hind and aw/hound will probably need to be drilled, too.

Now, let's move on to the consonants. In the analysis, these have been blocked out by category starting with the "stops." The stop sounds in English, as you know, are both aspirated and unaspirated. You as language teachers know the rules for when we do and, more importantly, when we don't aspirate stop sounds. If you aspirate a stop sound in an English word and it's not a place where this is done in normal speech (i.e., non-contrastive situations), you come on sounding overly-strong. Stop^{h} it^{h}!! Clearly we don't aspirate strongly, if at all, at the end of a word unless we are being very emphatic. Now notice that the Arabic consonant stops are always aspirated. This is an area in which a discussion with the Arab student about a very simple difference in pronunciation can help him understand that he may be giving signals that may not be in tune culturally if he transfers his own pronunciation pattern. He will likely appear to be overly-strong and aggressive, maybe even dictatorial, if he aspirates stop

sounds in English in all positions.

The Arab's problem with /p/ and /b/, two stop sounds which are the same sound in Arabic, is so well recognized all teachers work immediately to help "Bebsi-Cola" become "Pepsi-Cola."

A quick look at the chart on continuant sounds shows that /v/ is not a sound in Arabic either. However, most of the Arab students who come to us are quite sophisticated in having been exposed to other languages before they get here. This may not always have been true of some students in the past, but more and more it is so. Thus, they may well have learned that /v/-/f/ distinction from other language study or from loan words used in Arabic.

With the nasal sounds, we all have fun listening to the /ŋ/ explode into ə /k/ or a /g/ because /ŋ/ is always used in Arabic in these environments (running-k, bring-ging). This doesn't usually overly disturb us, say anything "extra" to us emotionally, nor interfere semantically. Rather, it just lets us know that this is not a native speaker of English and makes us aware of how marvelous his control of English is, except for minor things like this. We know we could probably never achieve that degree of control in Arabic. Still, for Arab students desirous of near-native control of English, this sound should be worked on.

The /r/ sound is another that calls attention to itself. What a very difficult sound it is! The Arabic /r/--both initial and final /r/--is a flap (the tongue touches the roof once) while the medial /r/ is a trill (the tongue tip flaps twice against the roof). We recognize that nice flap or trill as very different from an English /r/, but it usually doesn't get in the way of our understanding. If it does, then it needs work, obviously. It might get in the way of native speakers' understanding of r-colored vowels, as in the example "na-i'rvous." This pronunciation might be a little hard to figure out, so for semantic purposes, work on the medial English /r/ may well be included in your classes.

Before leaving the consonants, I'd like to call your attention to the "hamza"--the glottal stop, which in Arabic is considered a full consonant sound. In English, we hear this only as a disturbance in blending. If we hear it at all, we hear it more like a vowel sound. (It is the "jerk" we use between vowels as in India ink.) No word in Arabic, you know, begins with a vowel. The hamza or another consonant always is the start of a syllable. There is a strong tendency for the Arab student to transfer this glottal stop to English words beginning with a vowel. This may distort rhythm and certainly interferes with blending. It can make the Arab student sound

very jerky. He seems to be interrupting his flow of ideas in a sentence by this frequent pausing. The native speaker of English finds it difficult to piece fragments of phrases into cohesive thought groups or grammatical groups because pause is phonemic in English. Pause has meaning, so what message is this student trying to convey? Besides impeding understanding, beneath the surface the listener may feel there's something strange, maybe even wrong, with this person who jerks and stops so seemingly inappropriately. Again, an unmeant message may come across. This is a feature well worth paying close attention to.

A final look at consonants involves consonant clustering. We all know how enormously important it is to work on any of the 150 English final consonant clusters which are not permitted in Arabic, as well as any of the 39 initial clusters that may be lacking or difficult. It's very important, I feel, to work on these orally, for I believe that this is one of the reasons our advanced-level Arab student, who often has had many years of English training, comes into composition class and writes his verbs without any of the end inflections. If we listen closely, we may hear that neither does he use them in his oral language. He is not saying them because he cannot add a final -s, -z, -d, or -t after two or three previous consonants. Arabic doesn't permit this much final consonant clustering. While the English syllable permits up to three consonants before a vowel and up to 4 after the vowel, (c) (c) (c)v(c) (c) (c), in most Arabic dialects only one consonant precedes a vowel (a syllable must begin with a consonant), and only one or two consonants can follow the vowel, cv(c)(c). Thus, the student doesn't speak these critical final inflections in a three or four consonant cluster. He also doesn't write them although he knows the rule. I feel it's likely that he doesn't write them because he doesn't speak them. At the least, orally interfacing written drill in this area may be a start in helping with this problem.

As important as work on the sounds of a language is, we as language teachers know that the most important differences which can cause interference involve rhythm, stress, and intonation. There are several contrastive features which are important for us to recognize in helping Arab students come closer to native English speakers in controlling rhythm, intonation, and stress. For one, monosyllabic words in Arabic are always stressed--a very important thing for us to know. Realizing this, we then ask our students what the monosyllabic words in English are. The auxiliary verbs, the prepositions, the pronouns, the articles. Stress these words: "I am going," "I did go," "I'm going in here," "He disappeared," and you get a very strong message. The

which might cause misunderstanding.

The same is true of question words which start a question (how, why, where, etc.). These are always stressed in Arabic but only contrastively in English. Again, a possibly mis-sent message: "Where are you going?" "Why did you go?" "What are you doing?" What are you hearing when these question words are stressed? Not a pleasant kind of question. The kind perhaps an angry mother would ask a child. Certainly nothing anybody would use in a professional setting, so this is another significant difference to point out and work on.

On intonation, I think it's important to realize that in American English we tend to start on the number 2 level of the intonation scale, if you think of using a 1-2-3 scale, with 4 as off-scale, indicating great surprise, pain or emotion. The Arab sentence starts between 1 and 2, rather lower than the American English pattern. What happens to you as a native speaker of English when somebody starts a sentence and you can't hear it? A little bit of annoyance, perhaps even a twinge of resentment, especially if it happens again and again. Notice also the internal sentence pitch pattern diagrams. The Arab pitch pattern is very level in the middle of a sentence. When we hear that pattern, we suspect a student is bored, uninterested, maybe sick, but probably bored, which doesn't make the listener feel very stimulating! We demand much more alternation of pitch variation in the English sentence, so when teaching pronunciation we need to be alert to this, too.

One last word on intonation. The 4 level is used in Arabic in "normal" speech utterances, especially at sentence end. As mentioned, this is reserved for extremity of feeling in English. If an Arab student's speech seems to be signaling too-intense emotional reaction, this might be an explanation.

Even this very brief look at differing features in Arabic and English oral patterns suggests so many specific teaching points that I cannot imagine anybody saying that the day of contrastive analyses of languages is gone. It is not, I feel. The more we know about each of the languages we're dealing with, the more specifically we can help our students.

The Sound Systems of English and Arabic

Vowels

English	Arabic
/i/(beet)-/iy/ /u/(food)-/uw/ /I/(bit) /ʊ/(full) /e/(bait)-/ey/ /ə/(but) /o/(flow)-/ow/ /ɛ/(bet) /ɔ/(fought) /æ/(bat) /a/(bother)	/i/(beet) /u/(food) ---- ---- /e/(bait) /o/(flow) ---- ---- ---- ---- /a/(bother)
The four vowels /i,e,u,o/ are longer/dipthongized (given a /y/ or /w/ off-glide) in stressed syllables, words and before voiced consonants.	The four vowels /i,e,u,o/ are short and "pure" in Arabic although there is also a long, tenser sound for each: /ii,ee,uu,aa/. However, the second sound is not the off-glide /y/ or /w/ used in lengthening these sounds in English but the first sound doubled.

Most the English vowel sounds seemingly lacking on the above chart are found in Arabic, but they are not considered full, distinct sounds (phonemes). Rather they are variants (allophones) of the five Arabic vowels listed and are used only in limited situations (before a nasal-m; before a velarized consonant-k/g; etc.) Arabic speakers may have no trouble producing these sounds in isolation and in other limited situations but may have problems learning to use them in all environments in English, which is necessary to understand and produce English semantic differences.

Lacking	Usual Substitutions/Problems
/I/(bit) variant of i/beet and e/bait.	/i/(beet) or /e/(bait) /I/ is not a full sound in Arabic. It is a It will have to be learned as a distinct sound in English to be used in all environments (it/eat; sit/seat, set, etc.).

/ɛ/(bɛt)	/i/(b<u>ee</u>t;/e/(b<u>ai</u>t;/æ/(b<u>a</u>t)
	ɛ/bɛt is not a distinct sound either but and /iy/ in Arabic
a variant (allophone) of /e/ so will have to be learned as a full sound in English in all environments (m<u>e</u>t, m<u>ee</u>t, m<u>a</u>t; Esther, Easter, astor, etc.).	

Lacking	Usual Substitutions/Problems
/ɐ/(b<u>a</u>t)	/ə/(b<u>u</u>t;/ɑ/(b<u>o</u>ther)
	/æ/ is only the front version of
/ɑ/ in Arabic. There may be problems hearing/producing it in other situations (fanned, fund, fond, etc.).	
/ə/(b<u>u</u>t)	/ɑ/(c<u>o</u>t;/o/(c<u>oa</u>t)
	/ə/ is another front version of /ɑ/.
Also, it is used in some dialects as a transition sound (an epenthetic vowel) between two consonants, but is not considered a full, distinct sound in Arabic so it is not counted in determining main word stress. Use in other positions and in reducing in unstressed syllables and words in English must be learned (<u>a</u>bov<u>e</u>, <u>u</u>nbel<u>ie</u>v<u>a</u>ble, etc.)	
/ʊ/(f<u>oo</u>t)	/u/(f<u>oo</u>d;/o/(n<u>o</u>te)
	These sounds are variants
on each other so will need drilling to recognize and produce semantic distinctions (p<u>oo</u>l, p<u>u</u>ll, p<u>o</u>le, etc.).	
/ɔ/(caught)	o (c<u>oa</u>t)
	There is no sound in Arabic
close to this. It is lacking in some American English dialects, too. Deciding to teach it may depend on the English dialectal area the Arabic speaker is in.	

Having Arabic students pronounce these contrasts will help identify problems with individual speakers:

i/I/e -----	meet, mit, met; wheat, wit, wait
e/ɛ/æ ----	mate, met, mat; cane, kin, can
æ/ə/ɑ -----	fanned, fund, fond; swam, swum, swan
u/ʌ/o -----	woo, would, woe; cooed, could, code
ɔ/o/ə -----	caugh*, coat, cut; gone, gold, gun

Note the necessity to drill three-way distinctions/contrasts, rather than the more typical two-way differences, because these three sounds are variations (allophones) on one sound in Arabic. As indicated, Arabic students often have trouble hearing these as distinct sounds and thus are confused in understanding semantic differences in funning speech.

He cut it/ He couldn't/ He caught it.
He accepted the bait, bat, bet.
He shoed the horse/ He showed the horse.

Other Observations on Vowels

1. Length of vowels is inherent or fixed in Arabic (either short or long), but the length of vowels in English varies:

   a. Vowels in stressed syllables/words are longer.

   b. Vowels are lengthened before voiced consonants (weed/wheat; plead/pleat; had/hat; sued/suit)

   c. Vowels are lengthened in words at the end of an utterance (I should hope so. Today the sea has a lot of foam.)

   Arabic speakers need to be trained to vary vowel length rather than giving equal time to all vowels.

   Particular work on using the schwa ("uh") /ə/ which is substituted for longer vowels in unstressed situations is usually necessary: to/tə the óffice/ fas; beliéve/bəliv; végetable/végtəbl; he can gó/he kən gó; they have góne/ they həv gone.

2. /ɑ/ (father) in Arabic is made further back in the throat than in English (it precedes velarized consonants in Arabic). Learning to produce this sound in English with-

out velarization may be necessary if the Arabic pronunciation interferes with being understood.

3. Arabic speakers tend to use a glottal stop (written /?/ -- the sound between words in "India ? ink") before all words beginning with a vowel in English, which produces a jerky, stacotto-like effect. (See Consonants: Others.)

4. Only one long vowel can occur in each Arabic word. In English words in which a dipthong (close to an Arabic long vowel) may occur, there can also be a long vowel (reveal, daily, beastly). Arabic speakers may use a short vowel for one of the dipthongs and distort understanding as a result.

Diphthongs

(One-syllable sounds consisting of a main vowel and a fronted /y/ or a rounded /w/ off-glide.)

English		Arabic
/iy/(seem)	/uw/(bloom)	No diphthongs but close equivalents to:
/ey/(same)	/ow/(blow)	/iy/(Arabic: ii) /uu/(Arabic: uu)
	/y/ (boy)	/ey/(Arabid: ee) /ow/(Arabic: oo)
/ay/(bind)		/ay/(Arabic: ay/æy/ y)
/aw/(bound)		/aw/(Arabic: aw/æw/ w)

1. Lacking:

/ɔy/(boy, annoy) (Note that ɔ/bought is lacking in Arabic, too.

2. Differences:

The off-glide of /y/ and /w/ in English diphthongs often are not heard (and thus not produced) by Arabic speakers although the doubled initial vowel (the long vowel in Arabic) substitution does not usually interfere with being understood by native English speakers. However, the fact that /a/ /æ/ /ə/ are only variations (allophones) of the same sound in Arabic may cause Arabic speakers to substitute /æ/ or /ə/ for /a/ in the two diphthongs /ay/hind and /aw/(hound). To prevent semantic confusion, these usually must be drilled.

English diphthongs are longer than the long Arabic vowels. Arabic students may need drill in len,,thening the sound as well as producing the off-glides.

Consonants

Stops (sounds which stop the air flow).

English	Arabic
Voiced: b d g j	Voiced: b d g** j**
Voiceless: p t k ch	Voiceless: p* t k ch
Stops are aspirated or unaspirated depending on position. (See below.)	Stops are always aspirated.

*/p/ is a variant (allophone) of /b/; it is not a separate distinct sound as in English.

**Arabs from different dialectal areas may lack /g/ and substitute /j/ for it (Saudis and Iraqis), or /zh/ (North African and Levantines). /j/ is missing from some dialects and /g/ substituted for it (Egyptians). In all dialects, only one of the three sounds of /g/, /j/, /ch/ is used so the other two must be learned. (See below).

1.

Lacking	Usual Substitution
/p/	/b/

/p/ exists in Arabic but only as a variant (allophone) of / /. It is not a separate sound as in English. Arab speakers need to learn to distinguish it as a separate sound and produce it as an initial, medial and final sound and in all consonant clusters (bath, path; a brood, a prude; lab, lap; etc.).

/g/ and /j/

Students from the areas below have to learn not to substitute their one sound for the two lacking sounds.

Have	Lacking	Dialects
/g/	/j/ & /zh/	Egyptian
/j/	/g/ & /zh/	Saudi, Iraqi
/zh/	/q/ & /j/	Lebanese, Syrian & Jordanian

2. Articulation:

English /t/ and /d/ are alveolar (made with the tongue tip touching the gum/alveolar ridge in English. In Arabic they are dental stops (tip touches the teeth). The Arabic /t/ and /d/ sounds are "thicker" but are easily understood when used in English.

/t/ and /d/ in Arabic, however, also have a second "emphatic" form (as do /f,l,s,z/) which require more energy to produce and involve a secondary movement of raising the tongue towards the soft palate and then slightly pulling it back (retracting it). This modifies the contact surface of the tongue, changes the shape of the mouth in producing a following vowel, and this, in turn, affects the vowel quality. If the emphatic /t/ or /d/ is used in English, this may be of some consequence in vowel differences.

3. Use of Stop Sounds

In Initial Positions:

a. In English, all stop sounds are aspirated (said with an accompanying puff of air) when they are the first letter of a word. Initial stops in Arabic are also aspirated but not as heavily as in English.

In Medial Positions:

a. In English, medial stops are only aspirated when first in a stressed syllable (atomic, addition, eject). They are not aspirated when first in an unstressed syllable (atom, additive, adjective). Arabic speakers sound overly-emphatic if they aspirate medial stops in unstressed English syllables as they do in Arabic.

b. Special attention may be necessary in English words in which the stop is followed by the fricative sounds of s/z (bits, bids, stops, stabs, backs, bags) which absorb the release of the stop. Arabic speakers may add an "uh" between the stop and the s/z (labuhs/labs; backuhs/backs; saguhs/sags).

c. /t/ becomes /d/ in American English:

between two vowels (city/cidy)

before a syllabic /l/ (little/liddle)

between unstressed vowels (at another/ad another)

between /n/ and an unstressed vowel (plenty/plendy)

These changes need to be learned as well as not aspirating the stop.

In Final Positions:

a. Stops may be aspirated in final positions in English but often are only weakly released (if at all) to achieve blending between words in a grammatical or thought group. Arabic word-final stops are always completely aspirated. This may make an Arabic speaker overly-emphatic if he continually aspirates final English stop sounds. Note variations in these sentences if the final stops are aspirated or not.

Stop it! She worked hard. How does it work?

b. Special attention may be necessary in English words when the stop is followed by another stop: packed (kt); bagged (gd); apt; judged (jd); searched (cht). The explosion/release of these medial stops in English is absorbed by the last step. In addition to aspirating, an extra sound "uh" is often inserted by Arabic speakers between the stops. Not releasing the sound may need work across words, too.

Light bulb, tip toe, big door, bread box.

Continuant Sounds

English					
Voiced:	v	z	zh	th	
Voiceless:	f	s	sh	th	h

Arabic					
Voiced:	__	z	zh**	th*	
Voiceless:	f	s	sh	th*	h

*/th/ occurs in classical Arabic but only in some colloquial dialects.

**/zh/ occurs in some dialects (North African and Levantine) but not in others.

1. Lacking Articulation

/v/ is not a sound in Arabic so it must be learned in contrast to /f/ to distinguish semantic differences: very/fairy; van/fan. However, /v/ is found in loan words used by many Arabs (villa, bravo) so may already have been learned.

/s/ and /z/ are made in Arabic with the tongue touching the teeth. In English, the tongue tip touches higher (near the alveolar/gum ridge) if it touches at all.

/s/, /z/ and /l/ also have a second heavy "emphatic" form in Arabic which affects a following vowel. Arabic students may need to be reminded to use only the non-emphatic form in English if vowel differences occur.

/zh/ is not in every dialect of Arabic so it may need drilling. (It is lacking in Saudi, Iraqui and Egyptian speech.) /zh/j/: version/virgin; treasurer/dredger.

/h/ in Arabic also has a more emphatic counterpart /h/. If used in English words, the speaker sounds overly-emphatic. /h/ is only used initially in a word or syllable in English in contrast to Arabic where it can also end a syllable or word.

Nasals

English	Arabic
m, n, ŋ (ing)	m, n(ŋ*) * n is not a full sound. It is only a variant (allophone) of /n/ and used in place of it when followed by /k/ or /g/.

1. Lacking/Problems

Since /ŋ/ is always followed by /k/ or /g/ in Arabic, there is a strong tendency to do the same in English: think-king, bring-ging, going-k. This calls attention to itself but may not interfere with being understood.

/m/ and /n/ sometimes act as a full syllable in English (as syllabic consonants) in: mutton, hasten, ridden, facism. Arabic speakers tend to give the vowel preceding m/n full vowel value and distort the alternation of stress and unstress basic to English rhythm.

/n/ in Arabic is dental (tongue tip touches the teeth). In English it is alveolar (tongue touches gum ridge) except before /th/: tenth, labryrinth. The difference does not usually affect being understood.

Others

(Semi-Vowels/Laterals)

English	Arabic
y (yet) non-syllabic front vowel	y
w (wet) non-syllabic back vowel	w
l (late)	l
r (rate) non-syllabic	r
(h*r) syllabic	--

1. Lacking/Differences

Both /y/ and /w/ are not problems for Arabic speakers in initial positions, but may need to be worked on following vowels (particularly in English dipthongs).

/l/ in English is "clear" before a front vowel and "dark" (velar) elsewhere (except dental before the /th/ as in wealth, kill the hen). Using these two variants is usually no problem since Arabic has two /l/ sounds (one is emphatic). If an "accent" is heard in Arabic speakers with this sound, it is usually because this "clear" /l/ is being used in all positions in English words.

/r/ in English is a retroflex sound (the tongue bunches and moves back in the mouth with no tip involvement.) In contrast, the initial and final Arabic /r/ is a flap (the tongue tip flaps once on the gum ridge). In a medial position, it is a trill (tongue tips the gum ridge twice). This calls attention to itself as different, but the speaker is usually understood if either Arabic /r/ is used for the English /r/.

The syllabic "r" in English always follows a vowel and "colors" the vowel (her, hair, oar, are, poor). It is heard when speaking slowly, as the schwa /ə/ + /r/ (hence the combined phonetic symbol /ɚ/) when following ɛ,o,a,u. In rapid speech, however, these sounds are heard as a single sound. Arabic speakers tend to produce two sounds, a full vowel and the tapped /r/, in place of the English syllabic /ɚ/.

na ir vous/nervous gi er l/girl

Teaching a lip rounding movement in the second part of the sound may be helpful in mastering r-colored vowels.

2. The "hamza"

A voiceless glottal sound (called the "hamza"), made deep in the throat (the sound between words in "India ? ink"--written phonetically as /?/), is a full

consonant sound in Arabic. It often begins a word in Arabic and then is followed by a vowel. In English, it is not a distinct sound and is perceived as a vowel. If transferred to English, it does not cause misunderstanding but it seriously distorts smooth blending.

3. There are other consonant sounds in Arabic not found in English, but they are rarely transferred.

Syllable Structure

English	Arabic
(c)(c)(c)(c)v(c)(c)(c)(c) (parentheses indicate possible combinations) a r a n s t r a n d s (tri)-u m p f t (phed)	cv (c) (c) Major dialects except (c) cv (c) (c) Iraqi Final consonant clusters are limited to 1.) w or y + c 2.) n,r,l + c

1. All consonant clusters of three or four in English can cause problems for Arabic speakers. The tendency is to insert an intrusive vowel "uh" or "ih" into these clusters.

> splendid/si-plen-did; sixths/siks-iths
> We almost uh start in this uh story/
> after rain uh storms/ that won't uh take place

2. The simpler consonant clustering in Arabic may also prompt speakers to eliminate consonants to fit a permitted Arabic cluster.

> many kind of (kinds of)
> he want to buy a car (wants)
> all are aspect of chemistry (aspects)

3. Double consonants are a feature of both languages. In English they are only pronounced as one sound while in Arabic they are given double pronunciation. Arabic speakers tend to do the same in English and may sound pedantic or overly-emphatic in doing so.

letter/let-ter	battle/bat-tle	ladder/lad-der
at Tim's	and drink	lab bottle

Stress/Rhythm

English

Syllable and Word Stress Patterns

Stress	Unstress
longer	shorter
higher	lower
louder	softer
vowel clarity	vowel obscuration

Sharp alternation of stress/unstressed syllables and words.

Vowel pronunciation changes to accommodate word and sentence stress/rhythm.

English is stress-timed, with time lapses between stresses nearly equal, but there is usually one stressed syllable per phrase:

I'm tálking
about the sálad
for the párty.

Arabic

Word stress is fixed (although stress rules vary depending on dialects). Stress is dedermined by the vowel/consonant arrangement and is always regular.

Vowel length in all dialects is inherent and fixed, never changing in any situation.

Monosyllabic words are always stressed.

Extra-loud stress is put on the tonic syllable (the primary stressed syllable in the most stressed word in sentence).

Arabic is syllable-timed, with time lapses between stresses nearly equal, but there is one rhythmic stress per word:

Í ám tálking
abóut thé sálad
for thé párty.

These differences in stress and rhythm often require special work with Arabic speakers in:

1. Learning to vary vowel length, particularly using the schwa /ə/ or another short vowel in unstressed syllables and words: unbelíevable/ə n bə líev bl.

2. Not using primary stress on unstressed monosyllabic words, especially with articles, pronouns and auxiliary verbs except in contrastive contexts.

I ám going/ I am góing.
Hé fell here/ He féll here.

3. Not using super/primary (extra-loud) stress on the tonic or most stressed word in the sentence to avoid sounding overly-emphatic or strong.

4. Learning to stress words of four or more syllables correctly and not follow Arabic stress rules to avoid errors such as:

Stress on final syllable following a long vowel:	lactóse, incóme, the convért
Regular stress on next-to-last syllable:	ínstead, pér cent.
Second to last syllable stress with a long vowel and two consonants:	com fór table.

5. Learning to use only one major stress per phrase rather than one per word to avoid sounding dictatorial and overly-emphatic.

English:	When he saw the exám he immédiately realized he hadn't stúdied enough.
Arabic:	In this example sentence, every monosyllable word (he, saw, the, he, he) and one syllable in every other word would be stressed.

Intonation

English	Arabic
Basic Patterns:	**Basic Patterns:**
Pitch changes occur over a sequence of vowels.	Pitch changes occur only on one vowel.
Sentences usually start on a mid-pitch (#2 level).	Sentences start on a low-pitch (#1 level).
Rising-falling pitch (3-1 level) signals the end-of-sentence.	Rising-falling pitch signals the end-of-sentence but the pitch drop is not as low (to the 2 or 1½ level).
Mid-sentence pitch level varies depending on sentence meaning.	Mid-sentence pitch tends not to vary from the mid-pitch (#2) level.
Wh-words starting questions are said at mid-pitch level (except in contrastive contexts) and rising-falling (3-1) contour is used at sentence end.	Wh-words starting questions are given high pitch (#3 level) and the 'remainder' of the sentence is at mid-pitch level.
High pitch level (#3) is used in exclamatory sentences.	Very high pitch level (4) is used in exclamatory sentences.
Level #4 is used only for extreme emotions.	
Tag questions: a) Rising-falling pattern used when anticipating affirmation or confirmation. b) Rising pattern when asking for information.	Tag questions: Rising pattern used in both situations.
Questions soliciting yes/no answers rise in pitch (#3 level)	Questions soliciting yes/no answers given a level pitch from mid-sentence to end.

Arabic students will profit from close attention to the intonational differences charted since emotional nuances are so strongly conveyed by intonation patterns. Use of the very high pitch level (#4) in English is reserved for extreme emotions (pain, surprise, pleasure). Using this level in "ordinary" speech may convey inappropriate emotion to English listeners:

English: wh|ere? Arabic: wh|ere?

On the other hand, transferred use of the internal Arabic sentence level pitch can convey boredom and lack of interest.

Questions asking for yes/no answers as in English:

Did you say you like Davis? if given a mid-pitch ending

as in Arabic: Did you say you like Davis? may convey incredulity, curtness or even anger which might not be intended.

Starting on a lower pitch level may cause listeners to miss the first words and provoke misunderstanding or even resentment at having to listen so acutely.

Not dropping to a low pitch (#1 level) at the end of a sentence suggests that more message is to come. Confusion and possibly irritation may follow when none does.

Transferring the pattern of stressing monosyllabic words to monosyllabic English pronouns and auxiliary verbs can cause misunderstanding and suggest emphasis not intended:

I am going. He is listening.

Blending/Linking

English	Arabic
Occurs	Occurs

Differences/Problems

1. Because of a simpler pattern of consonants in Arabic, there may be an incorrect use of the transitional vowel to achieve blending between three or four consonant clusters in English as in: that will uh take uh place.

   (See Consonants: Stops. In Medial Positions).

2. The transferred use of the "hamza" or glottal stop to English before words beginning with a vowel, plus giving it distinct time status, will create a jerky, stacatto effect as in: what /?/ is /?/it/?/I see/?/ on the table?

   Arabic students need to be trained to think and speak in phrases rather than in individual words as well as not thinking of the "hamza" as a separate sound to correct this.